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LATIN AMERICA
3 March 1977

CONTENTS

NR

Southern Cone Reaction to US Policy Moves. 1

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This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Latin America Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

RP ALA 77-018
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Approved for Release: 2018/10/02 C06627908

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Southern Cone Reaction to US Policy Moves

US efforts in support of human rights and against nuclear proliferation are arousing deep resentment in southern South America. The US stance on these problems seems certain to add to the already pronounced tendency of Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, and to some extent Brazil to draw closer together in response to shared problems and common perceptions of the outside world.

Washington's decision to scale down aid to Uruguay and Argentina because of human rights abuses has produced angry reactions in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Both governments have announced their intention to refuse even the reduced aid still available to them. Uruguay called the move by Washington unjustified interference in its internal affairs; both countries claimed the action could only aid the cause of subversion.

Brazil, already smarting over US pressures to limit its access to foreign nuclear technology, is taking a dim view of the aid cuts. Though not directly affected, the Brazilians undoubtedly see the reductions as another example of US "intrusion" in the area's affairs. Moreover, the military-backed government in Brasilia may believe that it too could come in for serious US pressure on the human rights issue at some point. Army Minister General Sylvio Frota has reportedly said the latest move indicates the US is "writing off the military governments of Latin America as its friends."

US efforts to influence the Brazilians on the nuclear issue also are having an unsettling effect in Buenos Aires. Instead of applauding a move that could conceivably arrest the nuclear progress of traditional rival Brazil, the Argentines are expressing solidarity with their neighbor, in the face of external pressure. The Argentines obviously realize their own imports of nuclear equipment could make them susceptible to similar pressures.

RP ALA 77-018
3 March 1977

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Argentina may see an opportunity in the present situation to rebuild its regional influence by capitalizing on the resentment of US efforts.

The physical isolation that has always cut off Southern Cone countries from the rest of the world has in recent years been accentuated by the growing distaste in the US and Europe for the kinds of governments that hold sway in the region. The latest US actions cannot fail to increase this sense of isolation.

All of the Southern Cone countries are administered by like-minded, conservative regimes run or at least dominated by their respective military establishments. Most came into being in response to real or perceived threats from the left and all justify their methods of operating by citing the continuing, if diminished, threat of communism. The leaders of these countries genuinely believe they are being abandoned by the US, which has consistently warned them of the dangers of communism. It seems almost certain that the Southern Cone nations will feel even more keenly the need to look to one another for support and approval.

3.5(c)

RP ALA 77-018
3 March 1977

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